THE RECLUSE.

BY SALLIE M. BRYAN.

"Oh many a time and oft had Harold loved;
Or dreamed he loved, since rapture is a dream."
BYRON.

Alone, alone—the misty moon-beams rest
In silent vails of silver on the flowers;
Clasped fondly to the wood's familiar breast,
The birds are dreaming off the voiceless hours

No, *not* alone—the winds are come to kiss
The feverish flashing from his furrowed brow;
And phantom-memories from the groves of bliss,
Come gliding through Time's ivied vistas now.

Most splendid was he in evanished years,
A form to look on once and ne'er forget;
But now his cheek is paled by midnight tears,
And tangled are the wild, rich curls of jet.

He walked the world and wearied of its glare,
Then fled to solitude to try *its* spell;
Now, by the mournful, haunted moonlight there
He looks on pictures that he knows too well.

One with a wild, dark eye that seems to flash
A proud defiance on his shrinking gaze,
As though the fires beneath the heavy lash
Would burn his heart for deeds of other days.

And then a stormy cloud of midnight hair
Sweeps round a brow haughty and dark and high;
And such a cheek! the rose is blushing there
As richly yet as in the years gone by.

"Norma," he mutters low, as if in fear
That from a lovely lip now hushed for aye,
An answer of reproachful scorn he'll hear;
"Norma!" and shuddering then he turns away

Another, with soft curls of golden hue,
That gently cluster o'er a lily-brow,
And dreamy eyes of saddest, deepest blue,
Just such as haunt my lonely musings now.

O'er this he bends and from his clouded heart
There falls a sudden, silent rain, and cold;
He murmurs—"Mary, Mary—still *thou* art
As loved, as worshiped as thou wert of old."

Then from the many more he sadly turns,
And gazes strangely thro' the skies and air,
Then quenches the lone lamp that dimly burns,
And bows down calmly to his wonted prayer

RICHARD HOFFMAN,

OR,

THE PEASANT AND THE NOBLEMAN.

A TALE OF LOVE AND RETRIBUTION.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

LILLIAN AND AL MOORAD.

When Lillian recovered from the lethargic slumber in which the cunning device of Nadir had thrown her, she found herself a prisoner in a small, square cell cut in the solid rock, and lit only by a brazen lamp, suspended by a chain from the arched roof. Her first impression was that she had fallen into a hideous dream; and she closed her eyes again, trusting that on re-opening them it would disperse—that she would find herself in the sanctuary by the side of her adopted mother, whose name she gently murmured.

Involuntarily she stretched forth her arms upon the pallet on which the priests had placed her; but the grasp of affection did not encounter hers. With a cry of terror she started to her feet.

"Where am I?" cried the agitated girl, looking wildly round her. "This is no dream, but reality—hideous reality. What has happend,—am I in a tomb or prison?"

Twice she repeated the word "prison" to herself. Then, pressing her hand upon her burning brow, exclaimed, "For what am I reserved?"

With frantic eagerness she sprang towards the door It proved too strongly barred to yield to her weak efforts, whilst the rock-sculptured walls of her prison cell echoed back her cries, as if in mockery of her vain attempts to force an egress from it.

Exhausted with her efforts, the hapless prisoner cast herself despairingly upon her pallet, where she remained buried in hopeless grief.

Suddenly she heard her name pronounced; and, raising her head from its sad pillow, beheld the Hindoo banker, no longer clad in the sober garb he had worn in Calcutta, but dressed like an Eastern prince, his belt and armlets glittering with gems.

"Lillian," repeated the traitor.

The sound of his voice convinced her she was not mistaken. Half mad with joy at beholding one whom she had known in happier times, who had frequently been a guest at the house of Sir Charles, she threw herself at his feet, and implored him to save her.

"You will conduct me from this hideous place," she cried, "and restore me to my friends. You are too good, too generous to wage war against the happiness of a feeble girl. You will save me; will you not save me?"

"Your liberty," replied Al Moorad, "depends upon yourself."

There was something in the look which accompanied his words which caused the captive to retreat from him.

"On one condition," he added, "you shall be free this instant."

In a mournful tone Lillian repeated the word "condition."

"I love you," continued the artful villain; "not with the sickly, puny passion which Europe's sons term love, but with the ardor of the East. Consent to be mine and life shall seem a golden holiday—a summer's dream. The wealth of Asia shall deck your matchless form; your every wish be anticipated. More, for your sake, I will forego the vow of hatred I have sworn against the Christian spoilers of my country, and use my influence to preserve your friends."

"Thou knowest that I love another," answered the maiden; "that my plighted troth is his."

The Hindoo regarded her with a cynical smile.

"Besides," she added, speaking yet more earnestly, "our fathers are different—I am a Christian, thou art an idolater."

"We can overleap that barrier," observed Al Moorad, attempting to take her hand. "A love like mine mocks at such vain distinctions."

"Love!" exclaimed the terrified girl, in mournful accents; "true love is not a selfish passion; it seeks not happiness at the expense of another's misery. What have I done?—how offended thee, that thou shouldst pass like a dark shadow between me and the sun of my existence? It is true that I am in thy power," she added; "but that, if thou hast one spark of manhood left, will be my protection and safety. I have friends who will ransom me richly."

"The wealth of Ind," replied her oppressor, "would not redeem thee. One smile from those sweet lips is far more precious to me than all the treasures of ravaged India. I need not the gold of the English."

"Fear their vengeance then," said Lillian, trying to assume a courage she was far from feeling. "The rajah has already been defeated in his attack upon the temple."

"Still thou art in my power," observed the banker, "in a spot where the invader's foot hath never trod."

"My countrymen may find me, even here; if living, release—if dead, avenge."

"Girl," replied the banker, "I would fain owe the happiness I seek to thy own consent. Al Moorad is not the least distinguished or the poorest of his race. Conform to the faith of India's gods, who have proved their superiority in the downfall of the Christians, the dispersion of their power, and I will wed thee according to the rights of Brahma"

"Deny my God!" exclaimed the captive, indignantly; "efface the baptismal seal of regeneration from my brow—become the scorn and pity of all who love me? never—never. Death were a thousand times more preferable. But you are not serious; such fearful words can only be meant as a trial of my constancy and faith."

"Death!" repeated the Hindoo, "I almost believe that thou wouldst brave it; but there are trials which precede it."

The licentious look of the speaker explained his meaning more fully than his words.

"Kill me," answered Lillian, "and I will pardon thee."

"Men do not slay the thing they love," said Al Moorad. "Thy life is far more precious to me than even the triumph of my race. I will not act ungenerously. Four-and-twenty hours I give thee to reflect upon my offer, then——"

"Have pity on my tears—my agony!" interrupted the unhappy girl, fearful lest her ears should be polluted by a menace whose words would stain her cheek with shame;—"have pity on me and let me die!"

"Have I not suffered, too," retorted the Indian, "and had my agonies?—seen thee leaning on another's arm—gazing with love-lit eyes upon his features—drinking with willing ears the music of his flattering tongue—and vailed my feelings beneath a smile, even whilst my heart dropped blood?"

LILLIAN AND AL MOORAD.

At this allusion to her lover, and the happy hours she had passed with him, Lillian yielded to her tears, the sight of which excited the jealous passion of her persecutor almost to madness. In his rage he would have clasped her in his loathsome embrace, had not the frantic shrieks of the hapless girl appalled him.

"I will not break faith with thee," he said; "the delay I promised shall be kept inviolate: use it wisely for reflection."

So saying he hurried from the cell, the door of which he fastened carefully after him.

Completely crushed by the agonies she had endured and the terrors of her situation, the captive sank fainting on the floor of her prison, and insensibility released her for a while from the consciousness of her misery.

As Al Moorad threaded the narrow, winding passage which led to that part of the cavern temple occupied by the chief Brahmin and the priests, he fancied that he discerned in the gloom the slight figure of the sycee retreating before him. If so, the boy must have been watching his interview with Lillian; and he at once imparted his suspicions to Nadir.

The old man listened incredulously.

"A lover's jealousy," he replied; "Hirim is powerless to protect her."

"But he may betray the secret entrance to her friends," urged the banker.

"When he knows its mystery," said the hoary Brahmin, impatiently. "Your imagination must have deceived you," he added, "for a hundred eyes are on him, and as many arms are ready to immolate him at the first sign of treachery. Trust upon the experience of age—it will not deceive thee."

"You do not know his cunning," observed his confederate.

"I know his faith," retorted the priest. "He betrayed his master whom he loved rather than the project accident had revealed to him; urge me upon this theme no further."

"But what if I obtain proof of his treason?"

The eyes of the Brahmin flashed with a momentary fire, which proved that the snows of age had not subdued the fiercer passions of his nature, but merely changed the object which excited them. If love and its thousand sympathies were extinct within his heart, ambition and priestly intolerance reigned in their place with equal sway.

"I will offer him," he exclaimed, "with Kehoda and the Christian Caleb a sacrifice to the outraged goddess; but it must be proved," he added, resuming his wonted calmness—"proved to the evidence of ear and sight, probability and reason; my confidence is yet unshaken in him. He sought me willingly——"

"That might hide a purpose," observed Al Moorad.

"Confessed that he had overheard our plan of poisoning the Englishman Tyrrel by the ministry of Hassan, that he would have saved him could he have done so without denouncing the chief of his faith, and implored me as he could not remain and see his master die, to receive him in the temple."

"And you believed him?"

"Yes: for the fool is honest. It was not his fault that the Englishman escaped the effects of the poisoned root, or that our agent perished to conceal our share in the attempt."

Little did the speakers imagine that every word they uttered was overheard by the party most interested in their conversation. At the door of the cell the sycee was crouched, his ear close to the ground to catch the sound of their voices. When the Brahmin declared his horrible resolution to sacrificing him to Mariatele with his other victims, in the event of his proving treacherous, a thrill of terror ran through his frame, accompanied by a pang of remorse at the recollection of his weakness in abandoning the master, who had been so kind to him, to his fate. But the feeling soon gave way to joy, on learning that their machinations had failed—that the sahib Tyrrell lived; and he crept stealthily from the spot, fearing to risk detection.

It would be difficult to say what resolution animated him; certain it was that since he had been an inmate of the temple his faith in the sanctity of Nadir and the priests had been considerably shaken, if not altogether destroyed.

He had been admitted behind the vail, and witnessed the pollution of the sanctuary.

CHAPTER LXXV

THE JEALOUS HUSBAND UNMASKED.

Little did our hero imagine that at the very moment when fortune seemed disposed to crown with success the enterprise which brought him to India, danger, in its most appalling form, threatened the fair girl whose image haunted alike his dreams and waking hours, whose life was henceforth so entwined with his, that, like twin roses on one stem, they must either sweetly bloom or fade together.

Such is the destiny of all true passions—of love, conceived in purity and truth, and nurtured by mutual sympathies.

The confession of Sanford that he had been urged by the jealous promptings of Mr. Chutnee to undertake the criminal enterprise which had terminated so fatally to himself, was an embarrassing one. Not on the merchant's account—there was little desire to spare him—but on Zamora's, whose proud and sensitive nature Richard well knew would be doubly wounded by the exposure of her husband's unjust suspicions, and by her name being brought in question as the cause of it.

In India, from the very luxuriance of the soil, the ranker the weed the swifter its growth. An observation which applies to moral as well as vegetable ones; for in no country does that foulest of all weeds, scandal, take deeper root or propagate itself more quickly. A few hours suffice to ripen a word, uttered in levity or malice, into a suspicion, a suspicion into an assertion, and a reputation withers as rapidly as a flower

It was decided that Lieutenant Marsh and our hero should wait on Mr. Chutnee before giving their evidence at the inquiry which the magistrates were about to hold touching the death of the confidential clerk, lest, as the former shrewdly observed, the insane jealousy he had conceived of our hero might induce him to throw obstacles in the way of the examination of Sanford's papers, upon which so much depended.

Having come to this conclusion, they started at an early hour for the residence of the merchant, whom they found seated at the breakfast-table with his wife. He had heard of the fatal result of the scheme which he had been weak enough to sanction, if not to plan, and a shade of mingled displeasure and uneasiness clouded his naturally sombre features. The lady appeared cold and reserved.

The English mail had just arrived, and a packet of letters from his correspondents in London lay unopened on the table before him.

"Strange," he said, as he turned them listlessly over; "here is a letter for you."

"From England?"

"Yes."

"Who can have written to me?" exclaimed Zamora, in a tone of surprise. "I have no living relatives or friends there."

"Sealed with black, too," observed her husband, examining it suspiciously.

Had he been alone, the probabilities are that the vague, restless jealousy which haunted him might have prompted him to open the letter; that not being the case, he handed it to her with an air of affected confidence. He forgot the adage that "our old sins are sure to find us."

As Mrs. Chutnee perused it, her husband watched, with secret uneasiness, every movement and expression of her features, in the hope of obtaining some clue to the contents. Suddenly her countenance flushed, and then became exceedingly pale.

"No ill tidings?" he asked, unable any longer to conceal his anxiety.

"Most painful ones," replied his wife, with a sigh.

"Indeed!"

To the great annoyance of the gentleman, she placed the letter in her bosom.

"If there is any point on which my advice or assistance——" observed the merchant.

"Neither," interrupted Zamora, whose eyes by this time were filled with tears.

The jealousy, suspicion and anger of her husband had reached their culminating point, and he could no longer restrain his impatience.

"I must insist," he said, "upon reading that letter."

"It will afford you but little pleasure," answered the lady, with a bitter smile. After an instant's reflection, she added, "Although I deny the right of a husband to pry into his wife's correspondence, on one condition, Herbert, you shall."

"Name your condition, madam," muttered Mr. Chutnee, impatiently.

"That you answer me one question."

"Willingly."

"Did you ever, previous to or since our marriage, receive a letter from my aunt, Margaret Esmond? I am answered," she continued, after a pause, "answered by the blush, which proves you are still sensible to the shame of a mean, unworthy action. Why were the letters of my only relative—and that relative a woman, too—kept from me? what a cold, ungrateful being she must have thought me!"

"It was wrong," said the abashed and detected man.

"Say despicable," replied his wife, without being in the slightest degree moved by his humiliation. "How vile, how utterly vile does your conduct appear, now that the mask of deceit has fallen. For years I was taught to believe myself a friendless orphan, the dependent of your charity, and I loved you for your benevolence, little dreaming that your selfish arts deprived me of the affection and knowledge of one whose heart yearned with affection for her sister's child; who, dying, forgave her seeming ingratitude, and left her the heiress of her fortune. There is the letter, Herbert," she added; "I will not break my promise."

She drew it from her bosom and placed it upon the table as she concluded her cold and cutting reproaches. The merchant caught it up and read it eagerly; it was from the lawyer of the deceased lady, informing Mrs. Chutnee that her aunt, who, from the fact of no reply ever having been received to the numerous letters she had sent, long believed her dead, having accidentally heard both of her existence and marriage, had, by her last will and testament, bequeathed to her her entire fortune.

The words which followed seared the eyeballs of the unhappy, jealous husband.

"To and for her sole use and enjoyment."

He dropped the letter with a deep-drawn sigh—the deceit of years was exposed. The bequest came too late to prevent the sacrifice of Zamora to the selfish passion which he misnamed love, but it rendered her no longer dependent on him.

"You will not leave me!" he exclaimed, in a tone of voice so humble and subdued, it showed how completely he was crushed. "I cannot have many years to live."

"Not whilst you respect the conditions under which I consented to remain beneath your roof," coldly answered his wife. "Attempt to break them," she added, "and I sail for England by the first vessel."

At this moment one of the servants announced the visit of Lieutenant Marsh and Mr. Tyrrell. The hour was so unusual for a call, either of ceremony or business, that the merchant felt uneasy. With the consciousness of guilt, he foresaw a painful if not humiliating scene.

"I will see the gentlemen in the library," he said.

"And why not here?" observed Zamora, whose glance detected his confusion; "they are neither of them strangers."

"In the library!" repeated Mr. Chutnee, still more emphatically, trusting to carry his point by a show of determination he was very far from feeling.

His wife, with womanly tact, did not choose to press her wish in the presence of a servant, neither did she think fit to relinquish it, but simply directed the man to inform the visitors that she desired to see them before they quitted the house.

The domestic salaamed and withdrew.

"You tried me hard," said the merchant, fixing his eyes upon her resentfully.

"We have both been tried, Herbert," she replied. "You consider yourself free, then, to act as you please?"

"Free as the bird," exclaimed Zamora, "who finds the chain which bound it is of thread, not iron. In daring to suspect me," she added, "you first weakened the tie which united us, and the discovery of the baseness of the means by which you led me to suppose myself the friendless object of your bounty, and worked on my gratitude to marry you, has destroyed the affection I once felt—for despite the disparity of our years, I loved you—loved you for the warm heart and generous feelings so cleverly assumed."

"And now?"

"Ask me not what my present feelings are. I tremble to analyse them. One thing alone is clear to me—that in ceasing to respect my husband, I have not ceased to respect myself."

When Mr. Chutnee met his visitors in the library, he tried to receive them with an appearance of cordiality, but the effort was so evidently strained, that neither of them were deceived by it.

The lieutenant at once proceeded to explain the purport of their visit.

"You have doubtless heard," he said, "of the attempt to plunder the house of my young friend here, and the death of one of the robbers?"

The merchant repeated the words "death" and "robbers." In his confusion he scarcely knew what to say.

"The unfortunate man," added our hero, "proves to be your clerk, Mr. Sanford."

"Impossible!" ejaculated his confederate.

"Who, before breathing his last, made *a full confession*," resumed the old soldier, "and gave into the hands of Mr. Tyrrell the key of a desk containing his private papers, which papers are of importance to the future prospects, I may say happiness, of my friend."

"I cannot give them up," exclaimed Mr. Chutnee, hastily, for he felt a secret satisfaction in thwarting the interests of one whom he regarded as the cause of his domestic unhappiness. "Mr. Tyrrell is neither the executor nor heir of the deceased."

"In that case it will be my painful duty," observed the lieutenant, "to make public the assertion of the dying man—that he was urged by you to undertake the criminal enterprise in which he met his death."

"By me!—ridiculous! What motive?"

"Ask your own heart," interrupted Richard, "and you will find an answer in the unjust suspicions which have poisoned its better feelings and wronged the purity it should have trusted. My happiness—the fame of one most dear to me—depend upon the possession of those papers. You surely cannot be so cruel and unjust as to withhold them from me."

"I am not to be taught my duty," said the merchant, coldly.

"I am afraid you will never feel it, Herbert," said his wife, who at the same moment entered the apartment. "You see to what degradation you have reduced me. I have overheard every word that has transpired."

Her husband bit his lips with mortification.

"You must give up the papers," added the speaker.

"Never," said Mr. Chutnee, sullenly.

Zamora turned from him with an expression of pain and disappointment.

"The world has read you a strange lesson, Richard," she observed, "since you landed in Calcutta. You little thought that I should ever condescend to act the eavesdropper, or my husband the thief."

"Thief, madam!" exclaimed the merchant, indignantly.

"How else do you designate those who rob, or league with robbers?" demanded the lady, coldly. "But I am tired of this wretched warfare. Lieutenant Marsh, when does the next vessel sail for England?"

"In fifteen days."

"I shall sail with it," said Mrs. Chutnee, firmly. "My presence shall not be made the excuse of crime or injustice."

This last threat prevailed, and her husband at once consented to give up the papers, which consisted of the letters of Carus Kearn; and amongst others one in the handwriting of our hero's grandmother, addressed to Mr. Bently, with the following superscription:—

"To be read only by my husband, in the event of my death."

Although the unscrupulous hand of Sanford had violated the injunction, and broken the seal, Richard religiously respected it.

Placing all the correspondence in an envelope, he carefully sealed and committed it to the charge of his friend and guardian.

"You will be the bearer of it to England," he said.

"And you?"

"Will follow Lillian," replied our hero. "I have paid my debt to duty, although the struggle has been a severe one, and love now asserts its claims."

"You hear!" said Mrs. Chutnee, addressing her husband; "the imaginary rival you have thought fit to be jealous of is at least a noble one, and worthy a woman's heart."

"I cannot argue the point with you, Richard," observed his friend; "for feeling, if not reason, tells me you are right; but I must accompany you in the search. We either return to England together," he added, "or leave our bones in India."

As neither argument nor entreaty could shake the speaker's resolution, the packet was despatched through the usual channel to Mr. Bently; and the next day the hero of our tale, accompanied by Jack Manders and his guardian, well armed and mounted, started from Calcutta, all three wearing the costume of the native travelers.

There was but little difficulty in following the route which the regiment had taken; and for several days the party pursued their way unmolested.

The first adventure which befel them occurred in a jungle, where Richard, whose impatience generally led him in advance of his companions, unexpectedly found himself face to face with one of those ferocious monsters, the scourge of India—a royal tiger. So absorbed was he in his reveries, that it was only by the sudden terror of his horse, which refused to proceed, that our hero was made aware of his danger. The half famished brute was already prepared to make its deadly spring, when Jack, perceiving his master's peril, leveled his rifle and fired.

The bullet wounded the animal slightly in the neck. Enraged with the pain, it paused for an instant; then crouched again, lashing its sides furiously with its tail.

"Fly!" shouted the lieutenant, who by this time had joined them.

At that same instant a shot was fired from the jungle, and the ball entered the monster's brain

The three travelers looked around, wondering from whence the timely aid had come, and discovered a wretched, gaunt, half-starved-looking man, in the dress of a fakir, making his way through the underwood.

Tyrrell expressed his gratitude in Hindustani. To his astonishment, his preserver replied to him in English.

"Is it possible that you have forgotten me!" he said. "But I ought not to be surprised at it: the mother who bore me, and the wife who loved me would scarcely recognize me now."

Suddenly our hero grasped his arm, and pronounced the name of "Mark Rayner."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

MARK RAYNER'S STORY.

"How is it," exclaimed our hero, "that I find you thus disguised?" and why are you absent from your regiment? What has occurred?"

"I am starving," replied Mark, in a hoarse voice; "give me food; I have not tasted any these three days!"

Like most travelers in India, the friends were well provided, and Jack hastily set before him an abundant supply.

"But one word," added Richard, "to relieve my anxiety—Lillian?"

"Well when I left her," answered the hungry